

Locating Whiteness in Western Sydney: Theory, Pedagogy and Identity

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Certificate of Authority/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

 23/9/06

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Abstract

This thesis is a discursive study of whiteness in Western Sydney, focussing on pedagogy and identity. Situated within a feminist and post-structural theoretical framework, the thesis is a contribution to exposing and redressing racialised discourses and racist practices through an investigation of whiteness as structure of authority; and being white as a location of identity, in the socio-political context of Western Sydney Australia. The thesis demonstrates the invisibility of white privilege to white people and, simultaneously, the mutual constitutedness of being white with other locations of identity such as gender, class and race, within the current context of Western Sydney. As a contribution to working against racist discourses and practises, the thesis argues for the importance of working within and across our differences. A central activity of the research lies with its engagement with my pedagogic practice in teaching about whiteness, difference and identity. Further to this, aspects of the thesis research are located within research as pedagogy, designed to engage the research participants in reflecting on whiteness and opening possibilities for new and different understandings about whiteness and being white.

A number of different strategies are engaged in undertaking this research. The first of these is to provide an overview of the thesis in relation to the literature on whiteness, the research methodology engaged and my positioning in relation to the research. The second strategy is a documentation and analysis of my pedagogic practice in relation to whiteness and difference and the insights gained over a number of years of teaching and about whiteness, difference and identity with a multitude of students. The third strategy is a close reading of my textual practices in writing about whiteness over the last several years—treating my writing as a case study—identifying the changes in my understandings about whiteness, linking to the emergence of the field of whiteness studies and the difficulties in finding a voice within the field. The fourth strategy is an analysis of discourses of whiteness engaged by the research participants to talk about whiteness and being white, within the context of Western Sydney. In undertaking this analysis of discourses of whiteness in Western Sydney, the research exposes the ways in which the history of Indigenous Australians and their dispossession through invasion and white settlement is written over by whiteness.

The thesis points to the importance of acknowledging and exposing the structure of whiteness as authority. Alongside this the thesis locates the complex space between whiteness as authority and being white as a location of identity as a space for working with and against whiteness. Further to this, the thesis demonstrates the value for research of combining pedagogy and writing and research together.